



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics
National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board

July 19, 2019

Secretary Sonny Perdue
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Deputy Under Secretary Scott Hutchins
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Relocation of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Dear Sirs,

The National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board met on July 17 – 19, 2019 and discussed issues related to the planned relocation of ERS and NIFA. The NAREEE Advisory Board was established in 1996 through the Farm Bill to provide advice and guidance to USDA on long- and short-term priorities for agricultural research, extension, education, and economics.

The NAREEE Advisory Board recommends the Secretary seek broad stakeholder input before making major operational changes that affect the policy and functioning of science programs. The Board does not feel that this process was satisfactory in regard to the decision to relocate ERS/NIFA. In the future, the Board is available to be consulted on similar issues that impact the science enterprise at USDA.

The proposed move may provide USDA opportunities to enhance the execution of its mission. The Board recommends that the anticipated positive aspects of the move be quantified, documented, and better communicated to the stakeholders. Efforts to mitigate risks and a detailed plan to assure that science and programs will not be disrupted needs to be more fully developed and communicated. We also recommend that USDA establish a timeline and short-term performance metrics around mission functions affected by the move (e.g., timely delivery on grant processes, timely release of reports or data analyses).

Furthermore, the Board's concerns are human capital, reinvestment of funds, and the public profile of these agencies. The Board recommends the following:

- Hiring be expedited and directed to the strategic priorities of the agencies.

- Relocation incentives be utilized to enhance retention and maintain institutional capacity and knowledge in the move for employees who are choosing to relocate.
- Attention be given to maintaining administrative capacity (support staff) as well as scientific capacity.
- Particular attention be given to the long-term strategy for recruitment and retention of talent.
- The agency documents the reinvestment of projected savings towards scientific programs.
- Attention be given to maintaining and enhancing the public profile of NIFA and ERS.

We respectfully request the NAREEE Advisory Board be informed of progress and challenges so that the agencies are held accountable and that we may provide additional guidance for a successful future. The NAREEE Advisory Board looks forward to hearing from you regarding our continued work and collaboration on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Baltensperger".

David Baltensperger
Chair, NAREEE Advisory Board